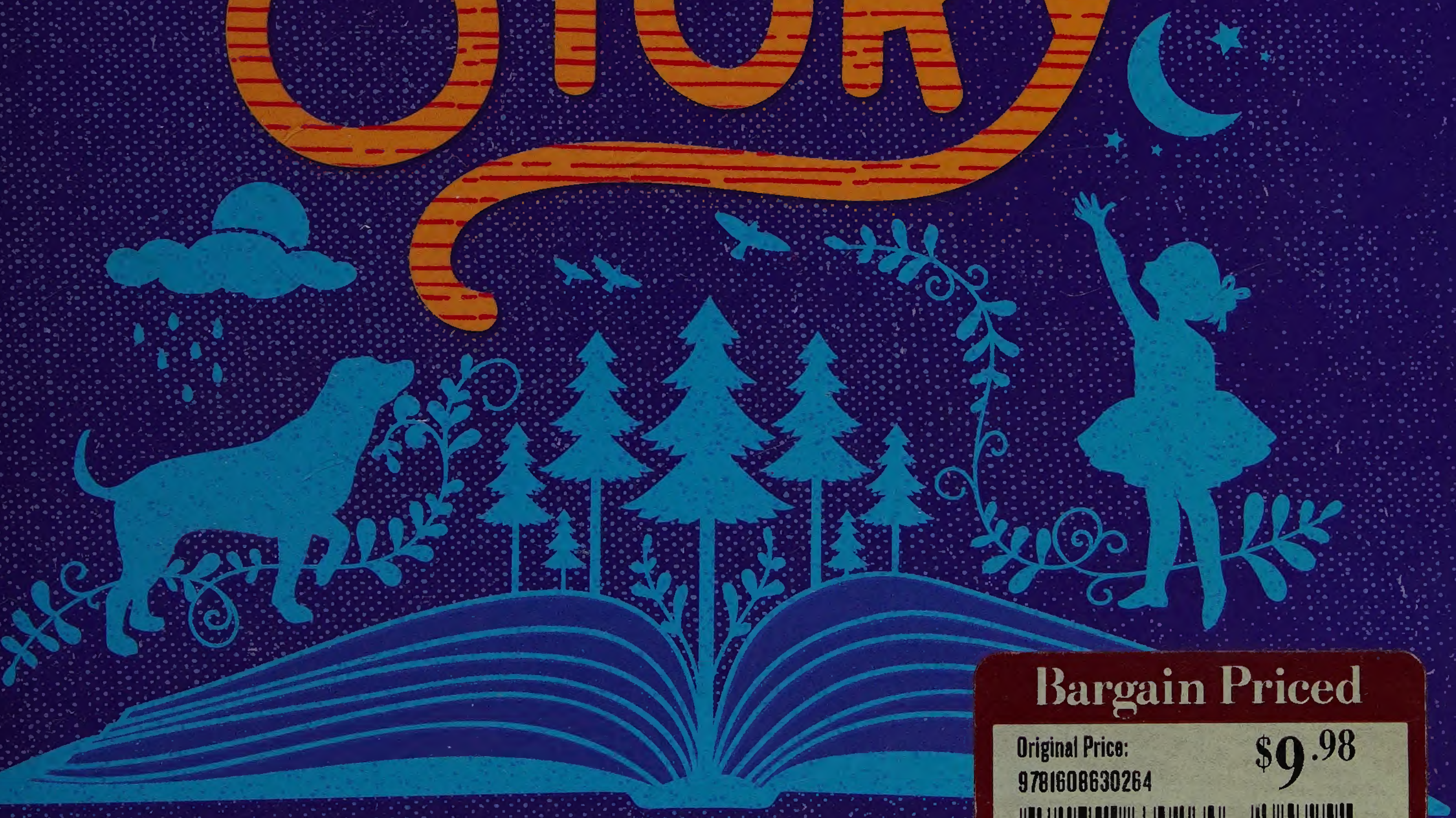
DRAW the STORY



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BROTHER FROM ANOTHER SPECIES

The lion reached the barrier before the zoo keepers could catch up. But when he got there, he stopped and stood still as if transfixed. The girl held her father's hand, unafraid and completely still. Each a caged beast in their own way, the lion and the girl seemed to recognize something in each other. The father didn't interrupt but moved his hand to her shoulder protectively.

The zoo keepers hadn't seen the cat behave that way before or since. Later, witnesses couldn't recall what attracted the lion to the little girl, but as the two faced each other, locking eyes from behind their respective railings, they swore they heard him purring.

DRAW THE STORY:

OCTOPORTRAITS

Octavius the octopus—Gus for short—was surprisingly adept at caricature. The aquarium had been on the verge of going broke until the cephalopod savant rendered a perfect likeness of Mrs. Pargiter on the glass wall of his tank, using his own ink to boot. Someone snapped a photo, and within hours the story went viral. For weeks afterward, newlyweds, celebrities and families lined up hours before the aquarium opened just to see themselves in Gus's eyes and post a photo online.

Anyone who was anyone had a profile pic à la octopus. That is, until the baby sea turtle was born with a perfect image of Elvis on its shell. Octavius was old news, but he hadn't liked the notoriety, anyway. He had always preferred self-portraits.

DRAW THE STORY:

DOG GONE WILD

Ever since he'd strayed from his owners in the tour group, Bailey the Labrador had lived like a king in Central Park. He missed his humans from time to time, but there was so much to do in the big city that he thought of them less and less. There were rats and squirrels to chase, pastries to "accidentally" knock from people's hands, and best of all, an endless buffet of children's faces to lick. He'd even found an unlocked supply shed. You can free a dog from domesticity, but he'd always prefer a roof over his head on rainy nights.

But Bailey lived in an age in which a pet was always a little bit human and therefore controlled by technology. The humane society counted his rescue among their small victories that fall. His microchip gavc him away, and he returned to the reluctant bliss of house dog-dom.

From that day on, the adoring coos of his masters reminded him of pigcons.

DRAW THE STORY:

YOU CAN'T EAT ART

Every morning the artists arranged their work on tables along the Seine. Tourists loved a hand-painted souvenir and the feeling of sophistication they experienced as they perused art by local, up-and-coming painters. The Eiffel Tower provided a perfect backdrop. The artists chatted and haggled, happy to play up the French Artist image if it paid for their "real" art.

To Jean the sculptor, the Cathedral of Notre Dame was commonplace. He didn't even have to look at it anymore to produce it perfectly from memory. No matter. The tourists were happy, Jean was fed, and at the end of the day, he removed his stereotypical beret and scarf, put on his worn Led Zeppelin t-shirt, and got down to business, his hands caked with clay.

DRAW THE STORY:

SNOWMAN'S REVENGE

One snowman locked coal cyes with the other and snickered. They'd been watching over the park since they were built the day before, and now they were crusty with the frozen morning dew.

"Here they come. Let's teach them a lesson."

"How dare they show their faces here again!"

The French bulldog and the Chihuahua, dressed in tiny dog sweaters, circled the snowmen and sniffed.

"Watch this…" whispered the snowman on the left. The snowman on the right smilcd and stilled. This trick never got old.

As the Chihuahua perched her front paws on the Lefty's side, trying to reach his stick arms, the snowman looked down, locked eyes with the pooch, and growled deep and menacing.

The dogs never tried to dismember them again.

DRAW THE STORY:

CHANGE AFOOT

The cobbler set to work on a brand new design. Not even the noble women of the kingdom wore shoes like these. They were light and supple as dancing shoes, but sturdy and solid with the hint of a heel and a high ankle for extra support and comfort. He'd even added a unique embroidered design to each pair for a little extra flourish. But noble feet were not on his mind. While they were designed with both style and comfort in mind, he used only the most basic materials. They were for the everyday women who walked by his shop, the ones who thought of luxuries last.

DRAW THE STORY:

A BEAUTIFUL RELIC

The cuckoo clock was ever-present in the background of thousands of family photos. Its face had presided over three generations of birthdays, Christmases, and a million everyday happenings. Hand-painted birds, blue as robin's eggs, chimed out the hours without ever missing a tick. The sound was so familiar that it never woke them when it echoed through the house at night.

When Karl and Elizabeth left Germany in the beginning of the 20th century, they'd brought it with them on the boat tucked amongst their few belongings in a single leather trunk. Just like its family, the clock had avoided the catastrophe of war twice over in Europe to lead a comfortable, undisturbed life on its little piece of wall.

DRAW THE STORY:

THE WORLD A STAGE

The troupe of performers unpacked its gear on the outskirts of yet another town, building their home all over again out of expertly packed wagons. Every week a new city, a new stage, a new audience. It wasn't unusual to eat breakfast over a fire with your best friend juggling flaming batons just a few paces away, no surprise to hear your mother burst into rhyming pentameter over dinner. Life itself was theater, and June wouldn't have it any other way. By age 10, striding a stage was second nature to her, but by age 14 her favorite job of all was carving and painting new masks for her fellow players. She lost herself in the work and, in turn, the troupers lost themselves beneath her creations.

DRAW THE STORY:

OWL WHO?

The female owl glided out of the night sky and perched next to the male owl on the cedar branch.

"Knock knock…" she began giddily.

The other owl rolled his eyes. This routine was getting old.

"Knock knock!" she insisted.

"No! Not again." This was getting undignified.

She sat quietly for a few moments, listening for the scurry of delicious mouse feet. Just when he thought she had given up….

"Knock knock…" she wasn't going to let it go.

He sighed, "All right. Hoo's there?"

DRAW THE STORY:

GUESTS

John got out of bed, shivered, and clicked on his flashlight. He hadn't expected his rented summer cottage to be haunted, but he did have a healthy appreciation for irony. Besides, he studied the paranormal for a living. He'd seen his share of spooky dwellings, heard his share of bumps in the night. But this was different. This little house was clean and bright. It was old in a charming antique kind of way with exposed beams and large windows looking out on the Atlantic.

He'd felt something funny during the day but had written it off as remnants of work that hadn't yet cleared from his mind—but he'd been woken in the night by the sounds of a family in the next room. A mother clattering around in the kitchen and three children playing what sounded like jacks. All the tell-tale signs were there. It was strangely cold for July, and his skin prickled. As he turned the corner from the hall to the living room, there they were.

DRAW THE STORY:

MASCOT BLUES

Just four hundred and three more days and Simon could retire. He'd never have to look at a cartoonish eagle again, let alone inhabit one and play the part. What had started as a desperate job between acting gigs had become a 29-year career. He didn't even like baseball that much, but as he flapped his arms and posed for photos with the kiddies, he couldn't help smiling a little beneath the huge, stuffy head. Four hundred and four days later, when Simon returned to the field in jeans, t-shirt and cap, he felt naked.

DRAW THE STORY:

PAPA MOON

"Mom, is there really a man in the moon?" Lizzie asked, stalling bedtime as usual.

"Yes, honey," Amanda replied, "He's kind and funny and he smells like flowers that bloom at night."

Lizzie looked out her window and squinted her silvery grey eyes upward, trying to stifle a yawn. The moon was just a crescent tonight, narrow and dim behind thin clouds. When it was full, it lit up her room clear as day.

"Can he see me?" the child asked.

"Of course he can. He thinks you're very special." *Is tonight the night to tell her?* Amanda thought. *Is she ready?*

"How do you know?" Lizzie asked.

No time is the perfect time. Every time is the perfect time.

Amanda began, "Lizzie, it's time I told you about your dad…"

DRAW THE STORY:

BATTLEGROUND: SUBURBIA

Today is the 100th anniversary of the day the garden gnome wars began. They celebrate it on this day every year, though nognome really knows when or why the first shot was fired. The human citizens of Downing Street have no idea that the north side and south side are home to opposing factions. They have no idea the flamingos have struggled to stay neutral since 1957. All they know is little golf ball sized clods of dirt and sod continue to mysteriously turn up in their freshly mown grass. The uninformed fools blame gophers.

DRAW THE STORY:

GOOD OLD SULLY

Sully played the trombone like an angel plays the harp. He was a free agent, playing with whatever band would have him. Great bone players were on short order, so Sully was in high demand in New Orleans, and he never turned down a gig. There was no club where Sully wasn't welcome, and no waiter whose first name Sully didn't know. He didn't have a favorite song, but he did have a favorite suit—charcoal grey with purple pin stripes thin as spider webbing.

DRAW THE STORY:

NEW BEGINNINGS

On New Year's Eve, in those ten seconds when that ball is dropping, everyone in the world is a citizen of New York. Times Square is standing room only, but when the fireworks add their lights to the city that never sleeps, Jody and Jamie feel like they're the only ones there. They were bundled in layers of fleece and wool when they set out that evening, but in the warm crush of the crowd, they're down to t-shirts, hats and scarves.

"4… 3… 2… 1… Happy New Year!" Jamie looks away from the fireworks and over at Jody, who is kneeling now, ring in hand.

"Yes!"

DRAW THE STORY:

CATCH

It was 6 a.m. and the canoe made the only ripples in the otherwise still pond. Greg's old hands shook a little, but with a few moments of patience, they'd remember their old habits.

"Okay, Timmy," he told his grandson, "first you hook the worm…"

Timothy hated being called Timmy, but he loved his grandfather. His dad had taught him to fish years ago, and he didn't care for it, but he let Greg go through the motions of teaching him, anyway. Greg had mistakenly called Timothy by his father's name twice already. That had stopped bothering him a long time ago. No, Timothy didn't like fishing, but he liked their reflections on the still water, almost twins when distorted by the canoe's wake. He liked the quiet and his grandfather's worn plaid hat. He hadn't even brought a book.

DRAW THE STORY:

SECRET CIRCUS

When the circus performers were tucked into their bunks and all the lights were out, the animals declared it their turn to have some fun. The humans were amateurs. They thought their locks were sound, rewarded the clever beasts when they did their little tricks for their audiences. At night, the mouse tamed the lion, the elephant juggled the monkeys, and the bears performed acts of daring-do on the flying trapeze.

The popcorn was mysteriously depleted by morning, the tiger's lips slick with grease.

DRAW THE STORY:

SUPPORT

The coffee was poured, the cookies munched. One last check to make sure the door was locked, and the monthly support group for aliens living among humans was ready to begin.

Hultlochen of the Eltonerian Empire, Hank for short, took his usual place in the circle, "Everyone get comfortable," he smiled.

All around the circle, extra-terrestrial beings relaxed into their true forms. After enough time on this humble planet, projecting their human disguises was easy, but everyone needed a safe place to be themselves once in a while. Everyone gets lonely.

When the circle settled, Hank opened up the discussion, "Who would like to begin?"

"I would," Orlnri, Owen to his human peers, raised his flipper, "my boss is driving me crazy."

DRAW THE STORY:

WHY NOT?

It was midnight at the Church of Elvis when Wendy and Lou exchanged vows. They'd been together for decades, and this wedding was their children's idea.

"Just for fun," their teenage daughter had said, as if it were a picnic in the park or dinner at a new restaurant. Her older brother had taken the bait and the joke had developed from there. In a matter of weeks, it went from a flight of fancy, a game of "Who can make the most outrageous suggestion?" to, "Let's do this thing!" until there was nothing left to do but say "I do."

DRAW THE STORY:

CELEBRITY MAKEOVER

The yeti decided it was finally time for a haircut. He was sick of his scruffy reputation, tired of hobbyists following him through the woods with their cameras. He wanted to blend in for once. What he'd give to walk down the street, grab a quick mocha latte, go to the movies. Frightened campers always left something behind in the woods, especially when he intentionally terrified the big and tall variety, so he had a clean, albeit mismatched outfit on. The stylist had been a little taken aback when he'd arrived for a walk-in appointment, but the bearded mountain man look was in these days.

DRAW THE STORY:

HAPPY ACCIDENT

The off duty clown walked into the bookstore just in time for story hour. He usually checked ahead to avoid this kind of thing. A rookie mistake. But he'd been in a rush between gigs, his mother's birthday was tomorrow and he needed a gift for her. While he was still in his wig and makeup, he'd changed into jeans and sneakers for the commute to avoid wrinkling his costume. The parents were a bit nonplussed, but the kids didn't even notice the discrepancy.

He left the store an hour later with a hardcover for mom and five new bookings for birthday parties. The bookstore hadn't even charged him, thankful for the most successful story hour they'd ever had.

DRAW THE STORY:

THE BOOK SPRITE

Evangeline was so small she could sleep quite comfortably in a mitten. She didn't know who her parents were or where she'd been born, and she mostly went about her business unnoticed if she was careful.

One winter Tuesday she stowed away in a handbag, ended up at the Public Library, and never left. Why would she? It was warm and dry, there were plenty of places to spend the day unseen, and at night there were so many books she could easily spend every day for the rest of her life immersed in a new story.

DRAW THE STORY:

THE UN-NARRATED STORY

When the movie credits ended, the cartoon penguins looked at each other and said, "What do we do now?" Unmoored from the narrator's guiding voice, they weren't sure how to proceed. They resented the happy ending for leaving them behind.

"But wait," said one, "This means we can do whatever we want. We don't have to be clever and cute anymore!"

"What do we want?" asked the other.

The birds thought for a moment, their heads tilted adorably. The idea struck them both at the same time. They booked the cruise to Hawaii under the names, "Doris and Lester Notapenguin."

DRAW THE STORY:

FAMILY TIES

Because she was raised by giraffes, Cheryl the tortoise naturally assumed she looked like her adoptive relatives. She suspected something was amiss when her brothers and sisters towered above her. They lolloped along when she could only shuffle and scoot. When she looked down, she saw brownish-green feet instead of graceful knee knobs. They were the same age, but she remained low to the ground among the rocks and bugs.

"You worry too much," her family insisted, "you're one of us."

"But your necks reach into the sky while mine retreats backward. None of you can hide within yourselves."

"We wish we could! How do you do that?"

Cheryl blushed and showed them again.

DRAW THE STORY:

SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE

Since Judy started night courses, it was still dark when she and her two children gathered for breakfast. Soon, Anthony and Sophia would be off to the school bus and Judy would be yawning behind her desk, so to make their little pocket of time together special, the family ate their breakfast by candlelight. The flames flickered in the kids' maple syrup and gave Judy's black coffee a golden tint.

After a while, the trio upped their game. Out came the good china and Grandma's silver. After school, Anthony even ironed the linen table cloth that they only used on holidays.

DRAW THE STORY:

GHOSTFISH

When Goldie the goldfish passed from this world, she was surprised to discover she had an afterlife. Talk about a fish out of water, she thought. She swam through air and water alike, her fins floating about her like tissue paper sails. Her gills fluttered as if she breathed, though she probably just saw herself this way by convention.

Does it count as haunting when a goldfish decides to stay home? She'd ventured out once, but she was so small and the outside world was so intimidating that she decided to stick with what she knew. Her tank had limited her to the kitchen, so she was delighted follow her family from room to room like a devoted poodle.

DRAW THE STORY:

FASHIONISTAS

When you're a mannequin, there's no torture worse than an itch on your nose. It didn't help that Gilda was dressed in a snug wool sweater and would remain so until the spring collection arrived at the department store. If only they'd put her in the men's section for a while, then she could wear an Italian suit or silk pajamas and let the boys permanently point their toes for a while. At least she had company up on the platform. Sonia was wearing a black button-down and creamy trench coat.

"At least they didn't put us in turtle necks," Gilda reasoned.

"Ugh, or shoulder pads!" Sonia snarked in return.

"Is that girl wearing slippers?" Gilda remarked.

"Probably," Sonia replied, "all the teenagers walk around in pajamas these days."

"Why do we even bother?" Gilda sighed.

DRAW THE STORY:

TLC FOR TWO

Mr. Robinson's Peace roses won ribbons at the agricultural fair every year, and for good reason. The judges had never seen such a gentle yellow, with just a hint of pink at the petal tips as if it were painted on with a fine brush.

"What's your secret?" they implored.

"The same as everyone else," he replied, "time and love. Tender care."

Every day after breakfast, Mr. Robinson spent an hour looking over his plants, pruning and tending, coaxing out their best qualities. He even read the newspaper out loud from his garden bench, convinced they benefitted from his voice.

What he said to the judges was only a half-truth. He wasn't the secret to their happiness; they were the secret to his.

DRAW THE STORY:

HERD PRIDE

The elephant parade was the highlight of the Sub-Saharan social calendar. The other animals used leaves and mud to dress for the occasion and gathered at a safe distance to watch their thick-skinned neighbors pass by in all their glory.

There's no canvas like an elephant hide. It's a moving carnival of color and texture. Their trunks, held up high and proud, held bouquets of wild flora, and braided vines wove intricate patterns around their limbs. No one remembered when the first parade happened or why, but to the elephants, it was a day to celebrate their singular largeness, to decorate themselves with the fruits of their homeland.

Elephants stick together, and together they shake the Earth.

DRAW THE STORY:

THE NEXT DIMENSION

When you're an 8-bit video game, life can feel a bit two-dimensional. The same pixelated obstacles to bounce over, the same mazes to navigate. And ugh that catchy tune. It was all so repetitive. Louisa the Mushroom was over it. She sat crouched beneath her usual tree. It looked like all the other trees, but she liked to call something her favorite. As she sat there waiting for the game to begin, she heard a strange voice.

"Is anyone there?" whispered Jane the Grave Raider.

"Yes! Yes I'm here!" Louisa thrilled.

"Oh thank goodness. I'm exhausted. Wanna trade games?"

"Heck yes I do. We can do that?" Louisa replied, ready for anything but another record-breaking round of the same old snore fest.

"Of course we can. Ready? Here we go."

DRAW THE STORY:

SIR FLUFFSALOT

The pillows were both fortresses and projectiles. They never knew they owned so many pillows. Couch cushions, even the padding from the deck furniture went into the elaborate construction. But they saved the softest selection for their arsenals. Armed with weapons so downy and harmless, the boys pelted each other with wild abandon. On a normal night, a non-sleepover night, they'd be brushing their teeth, milking every bonus minute out of the night time routine before they finally had no choice but to get into bed. But tonight they were knights in castles with cotton swords and javelins, catapulting each other with living room accents as if no blow would ever do them harm.

DRAW THE STORY:

LIGHT

Visitors traveled to Paris from all over the world to take in the stained glass windows of Sainte-Chapelle, but Father Hunt enjoyed his little chapel on the Northwest coast of Scotland well enough as it was. Sure, the designs were simpler, the panes smaller, but they were crafted with as much skill and care as their loftier relatives. He considered it his duty and his privilege to clean and maintain the windows himself, knew every nuance the sun brought out of the glass. The setting sun pressed its light straight through the glass, painting the priest's face with its colors.

DRAW THE STORY:

POULTRY PARADE

When he reached the other side of the road, Bruce the Rooster felt awfully anticlimactic. Expectations had been so high, after all, and he hated to be a cliché. Why had he done it? He asked himself. Because it was the only thing he knew how to do.

The crossing had begun as a joke years ago, a funny way to kick off the annual harvest festival, and had become tradition. Bruce's forefathers had crossed before him, he continued the legacy—strutted and swaggered like the best of them—and one day a younger model would follow. All year the rooster trained. Walk straight and true, reach the curb, and flap dramatically. He'd added the final crow himself the previous year and it was expected from then on. That's what he got for ad-libbing.

He may be a hack, a novelty sellout, but it was better than being dinner.

DRAW THE STORY:

IN SINK

The year the mermaids entered the synchronized swimming event, no one else stood a chance. Other teams tried to call it an unfair advantage and have them disqualified—they didn't even have to come up for breath, after all—but the judges allowed them to compete. The mermaids argued that nowhere in the rules did it specify that merfolk weren't allowed. Their point was irrefutable.

Even their competitors couldn't deny that their routine was outstanding.

When the mer-team swept every event, their gold medals glistening in the sunlight, the bitter losers set to work revising the bylaws. But the audience wouldn't be stifled. The following year, fans of the sport boycotted the event until the mermaids were allowed to return.

DRAW THE STORY:

FAMILY TREE

It took three generations of Joneses to reach all the way around the majestic sequoia. The young kids had come to California under the promise of Disneyland, but Grandma Molly had always dreamed of seeing the great redwoods. Now that they were here, the children were enchanted with the forest. It was like something out of a fairy tale. Molly stood there, one hand holding her daughter's and the other her husband's, her back against the bark. Looking out at the trees, she imagined the system of roots that surely spanned miles. She looked up and imagined the tops of the trees cresting Heaven itself.

DRAW THE STORY:

ALL ABUZZ

"Pass the maple syrup, please," requested Mabel Honeybee.

"What? Not honey?" teased Martin.

Mabel scowled, "Don't be predictable. This brunch is for the kids. Can you at least try to make a good impression on our future in-laws?"

Bees hovered and landed around the table sipping their apricot nectar until, finally, the happy young couple arrived. At first the conversation was awkward, but as they all dug into their pancakes and nibbled cantaloupe, they started to feel like family.

DRAW THE STORY:

ROOKIE MISTAKE

Whatever you do, don't anger the sock fairies. Jason learned this lesson the hard way. Ever since he'd accidentally trapped one in the dryer, they'd been terrorizing his linen drawers.

"How am I supposed to go to a job interview with skull and crossbones patterns cut out of my argyles?" he bemoaned.

DRAW THE STORY:

THE ANT QUEEN

At the base of the birch tree, the ants gathered to mourn the death of their queen. They came in single file, as was their nature, each insect carrying a small offering in her honor—orange peel, walnut husk, acorn, cottony dandelion seed. Soon the mound was the size of an apple. Slowly and with deliberate care, it grew until it was almost watermelon large. She had been a beloved queen through many winters. When the procession ended, they raised their antennae in unison and sang a lament only ants can hear.

DRAW THE STORY:

GOOD COMPANY

As far as gifts go, Rose thought, the orchid was lovely. At least it wasn't the usual, unimaginative offering her students placed on her desk, pleased with their originality.

"Ah, a rose. How thoughtful," she placated time and again.

The problem was the upkeep. Orchids are delicate and require precise attention. Rose was determined to keep a plant alive for once. She took it home on weekends and even enlisted friends to tend to it when she went on vacation.

I'd be better off with a dog, she thought. But it really was an exquisite thing to look at.

DRAW THE STORY:

WATERCOLOR

Being a plein air painter in New England takes guts, and long underwear. Bundled up like a skier in her fingerless gloves, Trudie nestled her easel into the sand and got to work. A beach in winter is wholly different from a summer seaside, and she was determined to capture its wild, untamable essence as the tide came in. It would be the centerpiece of her new show at the gallery.

Her nose was numb and her fingertips were turning blue, but she didn't care. The sea spoke to her. When she was almost finished, an abrupt gust of wind took the painting, easel and all, into the waves.

DRAW THE STORY:

LITTLE MIRACLE

This would be Gerald's last Christmas playing Santa at the Small Town Mall. His knees just couldn't take it anymore. Besides, the children who came into the post office regularly with their parents were beginning to recognize him. He'd been able to convince a couple of them that the post office was a front for a satellite workshop, but he felt guilty lying to the innocent.

Gerald sat in his red velvet chair surrounded by elaborate decorations, flanked by elven teenagers, and did his best to make this a Christmas the children of Small Town would never forget. The twinkle in his eye was genuine and for a little while he forgot himself in the role.

DRAW THE STORY:

REALITY TV BITES

"This week on Dragon Hoarders, we meet Fangthorn the Malevolent. Our team has faced some tough characters this season, but Fangthorn may be our most challenging case yet. Fangthorn has been pillaging kingdoms for centuries, so rumor has it his hoard is vast beyond comprehension."

Trevor, the host of Dragon Hoarders, checked his microphone and lowered his voice to a stage whisper, "Let's see what we're dealing with." He waved the camera man to follow.

Fangthorn was sleeping on a mountain of glittering plunder when the crew crept inside, or at least that's what he wanted them to believe.

DRAW THE STORY:

CONFECTIONARY ARTS

Simmons the baker had outdone himself. The cake was such a work of art that it pained him to imagine his customers eating it. He'd crafted each bloom out of shimmering sugar and a light touch of coloring, and the flowers covered the whole surface so that the cake looked like a lush garden kissed by frost. His only consolation was the idea of all the wedding photos. His art may be fleeting, but it would bc immortalized, the centerpiece of a lifelong memory.

DRAW THE STORY:

HAPPINESS IN A MUG

Every mug in Sadie's House of Coffee was different. When she opened the café last year, it was just as much to put her collection to good use as it was to start a business. After twenty years of traveling the world and never resisting a clever coffee cup, the assortment was staggering. No color, shape or style was missing. There was no room for them all in her cupboards, and she refused to relegate any of them to storage, so the solution was clear.

Seeing her customers clasp them in their hands, blow steam and take sip after tender sip filled her with joy. Every evening when they were washed and lined up on the shelf, she remembered all the corners of the Earth from which they came and smiled with contentment.

DRAW THE STORY:

BRONZE BOMBSHELLS

When the doors of the Metropolitan Museum of Art closed and the clock struck midnight, the Degas ballerinas came to life in their glass case. They had no names, no voices, but they were not lacking in cleverness and over the years they learned how to escape their enclosure without detection.

They flitted with practiced grace through the palatial rooms of the museum, silently exclaiming the beauty of their neighbors. As the building itself was a work of art, they were content to remain inside its walls. They were made to be looked at and enjoyed the attention of patrons, so the ageless dancers were always back in position before the staff returned each morning, none the wiser.

DRAW THE STORY:

GIANTS IN THE HEIGHTS

High in the granite mountain peaks of Montana lived two giant brothers. They were small for their kind and slouched out of habit. On a remote mountainside where none dared to venture, they built themselves a log cabin befitting their size and lived there quite happily with a grizzly bear for a pet. With nothing but time to spare, they decked out the house with huge hand-carved furniture, fur blankets, and cushions stuffed with goose feathers.

On chilly summer nights, for it even snows in summer at such great heights, the brothers slept out under the stars beside a mammoth bonfire. The grizzly curled up in a pile of leaves he assembled just so. In the winter, all three hunkered down to hibernate, their snores lost in the icy gales.

DRAW THE STORY:

MISSED CONNECTION

The train was scheduled to leave any minute, and it wouldn't wait for her, but Cecile couldn't help lingering outside for just a few moments more. The old-fashioned clock clicked and chimed out the hour. She gripped her green leather suitcase in her gloved hand and finally had no choice but to board.

As the train doors closed and she took her seat by the window, she looked out and saw her father run breathless onto the platform. They found each other's eyes immediately. He blew a kiss and she caught it, then pressed her hand to the glass, the gloves forgotten in her lap. He'd done his best.

DRAW THE STORY:

SUDDEN DEATH OVERTIME

At the first and last dinosaur soccer match, the plant-eaters shocked the meat-eaters with their defensive skills. The carnivores had expected easy pickings, being more agile and aggressive, not to mention the advantage of walking easily on two legs. But for all their cunning, the raptors couldn't get past the ankylosaurus goalie. That massive tail, a marvel of evolution, came in handy in more ways than one.

More than once the referee called a time out to replace a ball that had been skewered on a triceratops's horn, and several tyrannosaurs—barred from playing for obvious reasons—were kicked out of the stadium for harsh language. No winner, no loser, it was remembered as a grudge match for the ages. No one dared suggest a rematch.

DRAW THE STORY:

A VERY MODERN COVEN

"I thought this was a wine tasting party," George whispered in Joni's ear as they entered the apartment.

"It is," Joni answered casually.

"Then what's with all the pointy hats?"

"Oh, did I not mention I'm a witch?" Joni whipped out her wine glass and approached the cauldron, waving to her friends and acquaintances. George stood aghast for a moment, but as he watched the gathering, it really did look and sound like any other wine tasting, albeit with some odd details and a few too many black cats meandering about.

George eased his way in. He approached the assortment of cheese hesitantly, but he had to admit the Gouda was delightful.

DRAW THE STORY:

SIMPLE PLEASURES

Blacky the cat's favorite napping spot was under the rhododendron bushes. It was shady and cool, and most importantly, it was private. The other cats in the neighborhood hadn't discovered it yet, and she had it all to herself. She pitied pack animals and enjoyed no one's company more than her own. After snoozing away the afternoon, she uncurled herself, rolled on her back and stretched luxuriously, looking up through the clusters of magenta blossoms. Yes, life was good.

DRAW THE STORY:

NIGHT FLIGHT

After another successful take off, the flight crew settled in for an overnight transcontinental journey. In the bustle of preparing for the long trip, the werewolf in first class had lost track of the date. He thought he was okay for another day and would be settled safely in his hotel for the full moon. He was wrong. Halfway across the Pacific Ocean, his body started to tingle. He grabbed the XXXL hoodie he kept in his backpack for emergencies, and made his way to the lavatory, thankful he'd worn stretchy pants.

"Well, that was interesting," he muttered to himself as he emerged from the cramped restroom and crept back to his seat, hood up and resisting the urge to howl.

DRAW THE STORY:

REGGIE ROCK AND THE PRIMATES

When Reggie found out his backup band was made up of apes, he started having second thoughts about his comeback tour.

"The audience will eat it up!" his agent insisted, "You'll sell out every show!"

Reggie was skeptical, "I mean at least they have thumbs, man, but can they rock?"

His agent assured him their groove was unmatched—and he was right. They certainly had their own unique sound. It helps when the drummer and bass can play with four hands.

The crowd begged for not two, but three encores. Reggie would never step up to the mic without The Primates behind him again.

DRAW THE STORY:

TRANQUILITY SQUARED

The kayak nudged the lily pads gently aside as it passed through the water. Blue dragonflies perched on the white lilies, their wings still weighed down with morning dew. This was Harriet's favorite time of day, just as the sun rose over the pines. The trees, the orange clouds, and Harriet herself were exact copies of themselves, upside down on the water's glassy surface.

DRAW THE STORY:

DON'T WAKE THE TIGER

The tiger just wanted to nap in peace. Was that so much to ask? Ever since the mouse children had grown big enough to venture out on their own, they'd made it a game to see who could get closest to him without chickening out. They'd scurry and whisper, thinking they were stealthy as snakes. He tried to ignore them. Their bony little bodies weren't worth his time and effort. But their squeaky voices pierced through his dreams and directly into his brain. He was starting to twitch. One good roar would teach them some manners.

DRAW THE STORY:

OLD FRIEND OAK

The oak tree was hundreds of years old. It had stood in the university quad for generations and would for many more still. Students read in its shade, climbed onto its lower branches, and some even greeted it as they passed by. It was on all the letterhead and in all the photos on the university's website. The townies even called the university "Oak College" more than they called it by its actual name. This fall as the students returned, it grceted them as always with a fantastic display of autumn colors. Because it was still only September, half the leaves were still green while the others looked as if the sky had dumped a bucket of sunset orange on its head.

DRAW THE STORY:

MORE THAN A MOUTHFUL

The moth and the spider glared at each other across the intricate web. The spider was hungry, but this winged thing was huge and intimidating. It almost looked like a small brown bird, not at all like the flies and mosquitoes she was used to. There was no way the spider could eat the whole insect, even if she could manage to encase it in a silky sac. A dinner party, perhaps? It was quite a marvelous thing to look at, she had to admit. Her friends would be impressed.

The moth's body was stuck, but its wings hadn't given up. It writhed and flapped to free itself but only ended up more entangled. The two would have to wait each other out.

DRAW THE STORY:

ALL'S WELL

The clipper ship crested the waves on its way down the east coast. It had been lovingly restored by the historical society. The project that had taken years to complete, and its maiden voyage was going even better than they'd hoped. The sails inhaled the ocean breeze as it urged the vessel along. Frank, the ship captain loves nothing more than a well-executed plan and a following sea. He could still smell the champagne as he stood on the prow.

DRAW THE STORY:

THE NEW FASHION

When the baby zebra was born with rainbow stripes, his parents were delighted. Camouflage would be a problem, but their contrasting black and whites had never exactly blended in, anyway. Little Joey was the talk of the savannah. Everywhere he went, the animals knew his name and greeted him with smiles, which he gladly returned.

Soon the cheetahs welcomed a cub with multicolored spots, followed closely by a rhino with a purple horn. Evolution does love a party.

DRAW THE STORY:

OVERACHIEVERS

Never invite architects to a sand castle contest. They take it way too seriously. Kids looked on in awe as the adults mixed water and sand to the perfect consistency for turrets and walkways.

The younger competitors couldn't beat them, but they could join them. They abandoned their amateurish piles to add shells and collect drift wood for columns and a draw bridge. There was no shortage of buckets and shovels of all shapes and sizes. It was the most ornate entry the judges had ever seen. As the tallest adult lifted the smallest child to place the seaweed flag on the roof, the crowd cheered.

By midnight, the tide had washed it away. It was a castle worthy of the sea.

DRAW THE STORY:

FROM ABOVE

When his parachute opened, Jordan let out a sigh of relief. Skydiving had been his buddies' idea. He'd gone along with serious reservations. The diving part was the worst—throwing himself out of an airplane was against his instinct for self-preservation—but as he coasted through the sky bolstered under sturdy canvas, he started to enjoy himself. He'd never seen his home town from this perspective before. It all looked so tiny. Even the church steeple lost its gravitas from way up here.

As he touched the ground, a little less gracefully than he'd hoped but generally unharmed, Jordan was ready for another jump. His friends, however, were shaking, and Brad was even crying a little.

"Who's ready to go again?" Jordan grinned.

DRAW THE STORY:

UNDERSEA FESTIVITY

Lucille the narwhal was famous for her theme parties. This week's soirée was kcbabs à la horn. Her guest list was made up of all manner of underwater creatures, and though the swordfish were all set, Lucille provided decorative horns that the smooth-headed guests could attach to themselves with ease. Everyone agreed the hostess had outdone herself. The coral centerpieces were an especially classy touch, and the one-octopus band played all the latest sea chanties. Sea turtles jumped at the invitation and glided in from far and wide. Even the snails came out of their shells to join in the festivities.

DRAW THE STORY:

TUFFLE KERFUFFLE

Life in Mrs. Tuffle's snow globe collection was humdrum until she had grandchildren. The mayor of Snowburg declared a state of emergency when the little tykes walked in the house every Saturday for their weekly visit.

"Everybody brace yourselves!" he cried as the world went topsy turvy in a blizzard…or earth quake, no one could tell in all the kerfuffle.

One Sunday, Mrs. Tuffle picked up the Snowburg globe for a dusting and gasped. Instead of a little town full of quaint citizens, she saw tiny boarded up windows and placards that read, "Heck no, we won't snow," "Snowburg is on strike!" and "We're people, too!" It took weeks on a higher shelf for the children of Snowburg to start building their eternal snowman again in the town square, but their voices were heard.

DRAW THE STORY:

BUNNY NEEDS A BREAK

The magician reached into his hat, just as he'd rehearsed it a hundred times, but instead of grasping fluffy white bunny ears, he pulled out a postcard. It showed a white rabbit floating in a pool in the sun, a cocktail on its own floatie beside him. "Greetings from Miami" sprawled across the top in neon pink script. On the back it read, "On vacation, back next week," with a familiar paw print. That week, the rubber chicken got a promotion.

DRAW THE STORY:

WESTWARD HO

The 1965 canary yellow Volkswagen beetle still started. It was a little rough, but it was alive. Corey bought it with all the cash in his savings. He couldn't wait to show his daughter. It had been just the two of them for so long, and this little car was joy on wheels. He couldn't help but smile when he looked at it. A meandering road trip across the country was a foregone conclusion. It just had to happen.

On the first day of summer vacation, they left Chicago. Dad and daughter took photos with the car everywhere they stopped, whether they were in front of a national landmark, a gas station in the middle of nowhere, or a random cactus in New Mexico. When they reached Seattle, they never looked back.

DRAW THE STORY:

SCREAM-TASTIC

When the Scream-a-Tron was finished, Josie was first in line to test it out. She had been riding roller coasters since she was ten years old. She'd braved every coaster in the United States, some of them five or six times. The Scream-a-Tron had more loops than any other roller coaster ever built. Riders spent more time upside down than they did right side up. You had to be over 18 and sign a waiver just to get in line.

Challenge accepted, thought Josie. Not only was she the first to ride the Scream-a-Tron, she went twice in a row. Her second ride put her in the record books, but she was so disoriented that the second her feet hit the floor she fell over. Hours later, when she could finally stand, she declared herself retired and headed to the carousel for a change of pace.

DRAW THE STORY:

NEVER LET IT FADE AWAY

When Alicia saw the ball of light falling down from the sky, her first instinct was to catch it. Simple as that. No one had ever actually caught a falling star before, so the town was skeptical at first. Some insisted it was swamp gas, others that it was a large hail stone, but Alicia knew it was a star. Her faith was absolute. For starters, it never stopped glowing. It was always warm. And when you looked at it from far away, it looked just like its brothers and sisters in the night sky.

Museums and universities offered her buckets of money, scholarships and gifts, but she wouldn't let it go. She would show it to anyone who wanted to see it, but it would remain hers forever. It had chosen her.

DRAW THE STORY:

COMPANY

One foggy Monday morning, Jessie looked out his kitchen window to find crows lining the branches of the paper birch in his back yard. It was disconcerting, to say the least. They just sat there letting out the occasional caw. As he sipped his coffee he felt like he was being watched. He tried not to look, but he couldn't help it. What on Earth were they doing?

Outside, one crow looked at the crow to her left.

"Why's he staring at us like that?"

"I don't know, but it's weirding me out."

DRAW THE STORY:

SUNKEN TREASURE

The two lobstermen were almost done for the day. Since dawn they'd pulled their wooden traps onto the boat, unloaded the reluctant crustaceans, threw in more bait, and sunk the traps back down to the depths. Repetition was their friend, each new load adding a bit more to their bank accounts. The islands along the coast were old friends, too, and Jack and Stewart knew them all by name. Full-time fishing wasn't a romantic job by any means, but it was the only thing they knew how to do and it pleased them well enough.

"What the hell?" Stewart called out.

"What is it?" Jack called back.

Stewart pulled a yellow lobster out of the trap. It squirmed and fought, lashing out with its claws. Just one of these rare creatures was worth hundreds of dollars alone, but they didn't have the heart to keep it. The sea had given them so many gifts over the years. It could keep this jewel a little longer.

DRAW THE STORY:

PRIMA SLOTHA

Susie the sloth dreamed she was a ballerina—and because sloths sleep more than half the day away, she was a ballerina more often than not. On the tips of her claws she bounded through the branches and twirled through the trees. She was a swan on a lake, a sugar plum fairy, a sparkling snowflake lighter than air. The other dream animals stopped and watched when they saw her coming and clapped with glee as she passed.

She was so exhausted by the time she woke up that she couldn't help but drag her limbs about in slow motion, saving up her energy for her next performance.

DRAW THE STORY:

PANDA-MONIUM

The baby pandas at the Toronto Zoo were masters of misdirection.

"Wait for it…" the brother panda whispered so only his sister could hear.

"Now?" she had the snowball ready to go, but she was patient and stealthy as a ninja.

"Wait for it…" he tried to balance on his head and flopped over, sending his roly-poly body in an adorable tailspin. When the phones came out to photograph him, he signaled, "Now!"

She let the snowball fly and caught the tall gentleman in front right in the belly.

The visitors could never identify who had threw the snowballs, and the clever pandas never pelted the crowd twice in one day. The chief of security had it all on video, but he kept their secret, giggling over his coffee.

DRAW THE STORY:

MUSTACHE MOTIVATION

Nothing boosts workplace morale like a little competition, so the managers of Doldrums, Inc. decided to play into the latest trends.

"Doldrums is thrilled to announce that, one month from today, we will hold the first ever mustache contest! Prizes will be awarded for originality, artistry, and absurdity." It worked like a dream. Break time turned into a flurry of activity. The men stopped shaving and admired each other's beards, and the women spent hours crafting false facial hair out of colored paper.

On the day of the competition, everyone sported their best handlebars, Dalis, Imperials, and Fu Manchus, each with their own unique twist. When the winners were awarded and everyone went back to work, the management realized they'd have to out-do themselves next time.

DRAW THE STORY:

PERFECT HOSTESS

Tabitha Jones had been tracking the migration of monarch butterflies for weeks. She had it on good authority where they would most likely stop next, so she took the week off from work and set off. Tabitha loved the black and orange beauties and grew all of their favorite flowers in her garden. Witnessing the migration was on the top of her bucket list.

"Wow, this is the best buffet we've ever had," one butterfly said to another, swallowing some chive and moving on to a purple stalk of salvia. As the fluttering multitudes gathered in her yard for a snack, Tabitha was miles away, her binoculars at the ready.

DRAW THE STORY:

LEMURS' DELIGHT

When the crate of yo-yos fell off the freighter and washed up on the shore of Madagascar, the lemurs were elated. It didn't take them long to master the basics, and before long they could even perform tricks of their own invention using both their hands and their tails.

The jungle was electrified with the new fad. Tree frogs and bats watched in amazement, and a mongoose or two joined in after some persuasion. By the time the season changed the supply was spent. Tangled strings hung from the branches like artificial vines, and life on the island returned to normal. That is, until the Frisbee shipment went overboard.

DRAW THE STORY:

ONLY IN NEW YORK

After nearly 150 years in the same position, the Statue of Liberty decided it was time to change things up a bit. As the sun rose over the New York Harbor each morning, commuters and tourists checked to see what Lady Liberty would come up with next. On Sunday, she did The Wonder Woman, on Monday, The Thinker, and on Tuesday she did her best Marilyn Monroe. Every day that week she struck a new pose from Vogue to Crouching Tiger. When Sunday rolled around again, she was limbered up and ready to raise her torch in welcome for another century.

DRAW THE STORY:

ELF SONG

Without a word, the Elven Prince stepped onto the stage, adjusted a peg on his lute, and began to play. His coal-black hair soaked up the light. As his nimble fingers coaxed the song from the strings, he and the instrument were one hypnotic being. The song had no words; it didn't need them. He played and played until he and his audience were exhausted.

Without a word, again, he left the stage.

DRAW THE STORY:

THE SECRET KING

Because he could only be as bright as his surroundings, Mardi Gras was Charlie the chameleon's favorite day of the year. Nowhere but on Bourbon Street in March were the colors in such fine form. As he crept carefully onto a parade float, he soaked up the purple, green and gold and disappeared into the festivities.

Even though no one saw him there, he felt like the center of attention. Looking upon his adoring crowd, he declared himself King of Carnival.

DRAW THE STORY:

QUEEN OF THE DOUGHNUT

Latoya, the owner of the Delightful Donut, didn't need to advertise. The smell did the job for her. As customers passed by, the sugary goodness in the air drew them inside. From there, the doughnuts did the rest. In her shop, there was no such thing as "plain." Latoya didn't stop at colorful frostings and sprinkles. With a bit of food coloring even the humble honey glazes were a feast for the eyes. She lined them up on the shelves side by side, each pastry a work of art.

She never forgot her roots and stuck to what she did best—no coffee, no bagels, just doughnuts—but as business took off, Latoya took her art to new heights. She wove dyed dough into two-tone crullers, and she even constructed her own wedding cake out of carefully stacked doughnuts.

DRAW THE STORY:

WHAT TOOK YOU SO LONG?

When Peter's boots touched down on the stormy surface of Jupiter, he discovered he was not, in fact, the first one there. An enormous man stepped out from behind a rock and reached out to shake Peter's gloved hand. He wasn't even wearing a space suit. In fact, he looked like he was ready for a toga party.

"Who are…? How is this…?" Peter stammered. He checked his oxygen levels.

"Welcome, stranger!" the man's voice boomed, though he was trying hard to be casual, "You can call me Zeus. I thought naming this planet after myself would get you humans here faster, but hey, A for effort."

DRAW THE STORY:

THE FOUR ANTENN-ORS

The grasshopper barbershop quartet was the highlight of the county fair. The audience came for the jaunty hats and striped vests, but they stayed for the four-part harmony. Upon the tiny stage the insects bopped and swayed along.

Acapella achieves new heights when the singers can make music with their own legs. They started the show with their personal favorite, “Shine on Harvest Moon,” and fluttered their wings in unison for “Come Fly With Me.” When the finale came to a finish, they leapt offstage in four directions to appreciative applause.

DRAW THE STORY:

FINNIGAN WAKES

Finnigan woke up one spring morning with bunny ears, which made it a lot harder to be taken seriously as a grumpy old man. They were fluffy and white, as cottony as you can imagine, and one of them even had a jaunty little bend at the tip. He tried to cover them up with a hat, but they tore through his tam o'shanter and looked even more adorable. As far as he could tell, his life outside his home was over.

The next day, he woke from a doze to the phone ringing, "Where are you, Dad? We were expecting you hours ago."

"What? Who? Where?" Finnigan grumbled, still half asleep.

"Easter dinner, Dad. Remember?"

"Easter?" Finnigan reached up and patted his head. The ears were gone.

DRAW THE STORY:

DEEP-SEA DISCOVERY

Joan and Oliver dove down for another look at the wreck. They only had enough air in their tanks for one more trip, and a quick one at that, but something had caught Joan's eye the last time. They couldn't leave for the day without checking it out.

Joan swam down to the spot where she swore she'd seen something glinting. Yes, she spotted it again and pointed. When she got close, she discovered it was a hand mirror made of mother of pearl and sea glass. She looked into it, and instead of seeing herself as she was, all scuba suit and mask, she saw her face free and uncovered, her hair billowing out behind her. Oliver's reflection was a dashing figure as well, with wavy locks and shiny teeth.

"It's a mer-mirror!" Joan exclaimed, forgetting she had a mouthpiece between her lips.

DRAW THE STORY:

GOOD MORNING, SKEPTIC

Serious entomologists scoff at the mention of the mythical quilted caterpillar; believer entomologists know better. Mario was a serious entomologist, or at least he thought he was until one morning a large caterpillar with a distinct lone star pattern down its back perched, casual as can be, on his newspaper.

If caterpillars had eyebrows, this one would have been raising them as if to say, "See?" Mario scurried inside to get his camera, but by the time he returned, the creature had gone. A few weeks later, Mario would swear he saw a lone star butterfly flit by his head.

DRAW THE STORY:

STRANGE CLOUD

The cows looked up in unison as the hot air balloon soared over the dairy farm. Murmurs mooed through the herd.

"Look, up in the sky!" said Lucille.

"It's a bird?"

"A plane?"

"It's a cloud," Horace always had the answers.

"Ah yes, a cloud," the herd nodded in agreement and returned to their munching.

DRAW THE STORY:

SEA MONSTER'S DELIGHT

It was an ordinary day on the Santa Monica pier until a sea monster reared up from the Pacific. Luckily, all it wanted was some cotton candy. The owner of the cotton candy cart was happy to oblige, but there was a problem of quantity. His little cart was only meant for human portions.

In a feat of improvised engineering, the cotton candy vendor and the amusement park operator made an ingenious solution. That night, the evening news featured an image of the scaly sea beast happily munching bites of pink confection that twirled around the Ferris wheel.

DRAW THE STORY:

SHALL WE?

For a lark, the seahorses invited the jellyfish to dance. They bobbed and darted around each other in something resembling a waltz while beams of moonlight swirled through the swells. They met, they danced, they parted. Some stories need no more magic than that.

DRAW THE STORY:

TREND SETTER

Because they are notoriously snobby by nature, the cardinals were quite taken aback when a macaw landed on the bird feeder. His huge body nearly knocked the whole thing off balance, but a couple flaps of his wings set the feeder right again. The cardinals looked down their beaks at the newcomer, so the next time he visited for a snack he thought he'd be unwelcome. Instead it was quite the opposite. The cardinals had dyed their feathers blue and yellow in all the right places to match his. That regal wing flap had started the newest feather fad.

DRAW THE STORY:

SISTERS

Zoe and Zadia played in the meadow of wild flowers as if it were their own back yard. They cartwheeled in the high grass until they were dizzy, then rested on the ground, looking up at the sky through a riot of blooms.

The girls were born just a few minutes apart and considered themselves twins, though they came from different families and looked nothing alike. The summer they turned 10 they spent every day together. More often than not, they were hand-in-hand. They would spend all their lives thus, one way or another.

DRAW THE STORY:

DREAM CATCHER

The dream catcher had watched over Geordi's room since before he could remember. His grandmother hung it in his window when he was born, promising him a lifetime of only good dreams.

"At night, dreams fly through the air all muddled up together," she explained when he was old enough to wonder. She held up the dream catcher to show him how it worked, "The bad dreams get caught in the webbing, and the good dreams soar through the center circle and into your room." It worked. Geordi had never had a nightmare as long as the dream catcher hung there. And when he got older and his grandmother was gone from the world, she found her way to his dream world and they talked through the night.

DRAW THE STORY:

TA-BOO HISS

A low hiss settled in the room as the snakes prepared for yoga class. The instructor began the sun salutation in a soothing tone.

"We begin upright in Mountain Snake. Inhale as you arc backward, then exhale and bend into Forward Snake before you sweep down into Cobra..."

At the word "cobra," a nervous murmur coursed through the room. Cobras were not welcome in the class after an unfortunate spitting incident a few months earlier. The instructor realized her mistake and recovered, "...I mean Upward Facing Snake. As you refocus, feel the power of the sun soak through you. Inhale again, then rise into Downward Facing Snake..."

DRAW THE STORY:

IN A FIX

The organizers of the steampunk convention complimented each other on their monocles.

"And your idea to host SteamCon on an authentic steam powered locomotive was especially genius, Algernon. The crowd is loving it!"

The railway car was filled with people wearing Victorian welding goggles, intricate beards, and vests. The attendees were milling around the car, voting on the most intricate mechanical time piece, when the train came to a screeching halt. Algernon stood on a chair, "Does anyone know how to repair an authentic steam powered locomotive?"

A leather gloved hand rose in the crowd, "Good sir, we would be happy to comment upon your authentic steam powered locomotive, but you certainly won't find anyone here who can fix it."

DRAW THE STORY:

KOI PUN

Lili, the new kid in the koi pond, needed an ice breaker. Her new pond mates were lovely but aloof. They wouldn't break from their picturesque looping to greet her.

She splashed gracefully into their midst and gave her tail a flutter. Nothing.

She wove herself seamlessly into their choreography and added her own signature flourish. Nothing.

Finally she decided she'd have to sink to a new level to get their attention.

"Oh stop being so coy, everyone!" They all stopped and looked at her. They rolled their eyes but couldn't help smiling just a little. When in doubt, play on words.

DRAW THE STORY:

PASTORAL PASTIME

Every summer Anna looked forward to reading beside the sunflowers under her purple parasol. It made it feel like an occasion. Resting on her elbows on a blanket, her sun hat in place, she spent entire afternoons doing just that. She worked her way through the entire *Anne of Green Gables* series one summer, *Little House* the next year.

When the sun lost its toastiness and fall made it too chilly to stay out there on the ground, she folded up the purple parasol and leaned it in the corner of her room. Every time Anna looked at it, reading in bed as a blizzard covered her window in white, she swore she felt the sun on her back.

DRAW THE STORY:

OLDEST FRIENDS

The sun and moon had a lot of catching up to do. Their schedules kept them in a rigid rhythm, busily separate. But in the art of humans, they were released from the rules of nature and free to chat a while.

"Where to this time?" the sun asked.

"Let's see what they can come up with," the moon replied.

They could enjoy a cup of tea, recline on a chaise, or fill a park bench with light and shade. The possibilities were as endless as their celestial memories, as long as human imagination was up to the task.

DRAW THE STORY:

POINT: BUCK

The 16-point buck heard a suspicious noise and bounded into a thicket of trees. Camouflaged perfectly in the branches and brambles, he stilled himself. Even his tail was completely motionless. In the dull colors of late autumn, the angles of his antlers a perfect match for their surroundings, the buck was all but invisible.

The buck was right to bc suspicious. About ten paces away, the hunter cursed under his breath. He'd had a perfect shot lined up until his sneeze betrayed him. The buck hadn't gone far, but he may as well have been miles away for all the hunter knew.

DRAW THE STORY:

EVERYDAY TREASURES

Maria unveiled her new mosaic to thunderous approval. The overall design was an enormous circle, but within it, she'd incorporated smaller designs interwoven together. The pattern was symmetrical and balanced with colored tiles and smooth stones, but to add some surprises for the eye, she'd incorporated other small everyday objects.

"I call it, 'Lucky Penny' because I picked up anything that caught my eye as I walked down the street and put it in," Maria said to the crowd. Indeed, as they looked closer they found coins, shells, hairclips, buttons, tokens, even keys. All of the random flotsam of life worked together in harmony under a clear coat.

"The idea is to get up close to the art. Don't just stand back," Maria said. The mosaic was mounted to a wall at the town hall.

DRAW THE STORY:

NIGHT MAGIC

"That's four!" Alphonse pointed.

He and Juliet meant to go inside an hour ago, but the night sky was putting on such a show they lost track of time. They laid on their backs on the dock counting shooting stars, glad they'd gotten out of the big, bright city for a while. The sides of their shoes were the only parts of each other that touched. This view alone was worth the trip. If they looked down, they would have seen the same view inverted in blurry ripples on the water.

"Five!" Juliet whispered excitedly, not sure why she was whispering, "No, wait, I think that one's a satellite. Moving too slowly."

It didn't matter.

DRAW THE STORY:

SHOP TALK

"Then I said, 'I'd rather be a ship in a bottle than a tempest in a teapot any day!'" the ship in the bottle said to the Little Bo Peep figurine. Peep was new to the antique shop shelf, so she hadn't heard any of his stories yet.

The George Washington coin bank rolled his eyes, "Give her a break, Captain, she's only just arrived."

"Just making her feel welcome," the ship drooped a little.

"I don't mind," Peep said, "I'd rather sit next to you than skittish Little Miss Muffet, and don't get me started on Little Boy Blue. He just sleeps all the time. This shelf is a huge step up for me."

DRAW THE STORY:

FIND THE FOX

Danny brought his secret pet fox everywhere with him, whether he was supposed to or not. The fox, being a sly but loyal creature, always managed to blend in. When Danny went to school, Fox learned his times tables from the boy's backpack. At the movies, Fox peeped through the zipper of Danny's sweatshirt, daring to reach his little muzzle out for a taste of salty popcorn. Danny walked down the street with Fox curled up in his hood, and at the park, Fox skittered through the shady places, his eye always on his boy.

Fox and Danny grew up together. Neither was ever alone.

DRAW THE STORY:

Looking for more?

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